

FEPC members

Richard Hart

4/10/79

This request will be on tomorrow's agenda along Tom's material. I'll have full agenda and minutes in boxes first thing in the morning.

March 29, 1979

Freshman Policy Committee
Department of English
University of Texas at Austin

Dear Gentlemen:

I feel a bit like a soldier in a trench during this World-War between the English Department and those on campus and in the Legislature who believe our writing program is manufacturing illiterate jelly-heads who embarrass the University every time they write or attempt to write a sentence--perhaps a sergeant who knows exactly how to win the war, but knows, as well, that he will not because he must follow the dictates of the Generals back at the Pentagon. The Generals are, of course, the legislators who will never fund enough money into the English Department so we might reduce the size of our freshman classes to 15 and get on with the business of teaching writing. It is for this reason that I (paradoxically), with reluctance and enthusiasm, offer a proposal.

My firm belief, having spent eight years in the trenches, teaching, counselling, directing freshman courses, and seeing the frustration in student and teacher that over-population creates and knowing the excitement and reward of a teacher and student sharing the "learning" experience that small classes offer, that individual attention is the only intelligent and sensible way to teach writing. It is, after all, a skill, and I dare say a piano teacher with 25 students in each class would, at best, produce spasmodic Liberaces. But I also know that Generals trust less the voice of experience and more the surveillance and computations of a computer programmed by a strategist, a statistician, an economist, and a one-eyed politician. What I propose, then, is a tactic that takes into account the unlikelihood of small classes and one that might remove some of the central problems for members of our Department who teach more than one freshman course.

CURRENT PROBLEMS:

I. The teacher who teaches more than one section of freshman English (I am currently teaching three) cannot devote enough time in his office for students he needs to see. For example, after the first assignment this year, out of 75 students, I needed to see 40. To do this (at 30 minutes a visit) it would require 20 more hours beyond the office hours, the class preparation, grading and teaching. What the teacher ends up doing is devoting most of his energy to those students who have the most serious problems and thus students of average ability do not get the opportunity to improve. Under this proposal all students will get individual attention.

II. Although it is unfortunate, we do have students who need either remedial help or, at least, more work apart from that required in order to bring them up to the level of the class. These students will get special attention.

III. As it is now the Teaching Assistant/Teacher system causes more work for the teacher who teaches more than one freshman course. For example, I teach three courses and have one T.A. who is permitted to work with one course. The teacher must prepare his other two classes anyway, so the T.A. saves him no time in preparation. The teacher also wants to keep his three classes pretty much on schedule with one another so he must see that the T.A. covers the same material which means he must "teach" the T.A. as well.

IV. Part of the T.A. program is the training and supervising of the new teachers. As we've seen, not too many faculty members are interested in them (it took ~~until~~ until the end of October to place them) and there have been reports that many end up as graders and nothing more.

These then are some of the problems that this proposal hopes to address.

DESCRIPTION OF THE COURSE:

A. The course will consist of one Faculty member and three Teaching Assistants. The course will be limited to 75 students. In order to explain how the course will be organized and how the Teaching Assistants will be employed, I must say something briefly about the philosophy of the course. The course itself would be divided into three parts: Invention (or thinking), Organization, and Style. That is, at first we teach the students how to think clearly, how to find their arguments, recognize assumptions, premises, fallacies etc., and thus how to gather their own ideas. Secondly we teach them how to organize their ideas into paragraphs and essays. And third we show them how style affects both their thought and their organization and how it completes the writing process. The teacher-T.A. relationship will work around these three categories.

The course, then, will consist of one large lecture section a week (75 students) and two class meetings (25 students). In the lecture, the teacher will introduce the course and the topics and keep them on track by always providing guidance and direction once a week. In the two subsequent days, the teacher and T.A. (one per section) will team-teach the course. Now I must backtrack. In the freshman course there are always areas in which an hour lecture over material is essential and it makes no difference if that information goes to 100 or 25 students. For example, when introducing the deductive process, the teacher will easily spend an hour talking. If he has to give that lecture only once, he has saved Time he can use in a better way. Now the phrase "team-teach" may be misleading. Let me explain how it will work. At the beginning of the course, during the Invention stage ~~of the course~~, the teacher needs to take control of the class, primarily because the T.A. is inexperienced and, having never taught before, may find it more comfortable to learn and assist. So it will be conceivable, for

example, that in a given week during the Invention phase of the course, that on Monday the Faculty member will lecture on deduction; on Wednesday he and the T.A. would clarify it with examples and give the students time to ask questions. Friday, the T.A. would lead the discussion of an essay illustrating deduction. There would be times when the T.A. and teacher would teach together; at other times just one or the other would take the course depending on the material. At the first of the year the Faculty member would probably take most of the classroom work. But when we move into the Organization phase of the course, where the material is less difficult for both the student and the T.A., the T.A. will be given more responsibility, perhaps half of that of the teacher. Then in the last phase of the course--Style-- the T.A., himself/herself will have the freedom to organize part of the course.

In summary, the teacher will lecture once a week, attend three classes in which he will dominate during the first part of the semester and assist the last few weeks. Thus, the teacher who teaches more than one freshman course saves redundant time on material; he will teach and discuss with his students while he observes and counsels the T.A.

- B. For lack of a better word, the teacher will set up a small "workshop." For purposes of that computer, the teacher will receive "credit" for three courses he will teach and credit for one course for lecturing and running a the workshop. This is the way it will work and why.

The teacher, in lieu of a fourth class, will be available (perhaps in his office to save space) to meet with students who need special attentinn. Let me be more specific. As it is now, we have at least three kind of students--some incredibly poor students who need work on sentences, grammar, etc, and some average students who need a little of everything, and some very good students who need the insight of an experienced reader. As it is now, it is impossible to see them all. Under this plan, after the first few sets of papers, the T.A. will grade all the papers for a given class except those who, he feels, need the special attention of the teacher (there are usually around seven to ten in each class). This means that the class is being divided up so that between the T.A. and the teacher all the students will receive some kind of individual attention.

In this proposal, the, the teacher will work longer hours at the beginning when he is lecturing, grading most of the papers, teaching, and training the T.A. to grade and assist with the course. But as the semester continues, the T.A. will take more responsibility and more time from the teacher so that it all balances out. I might add that there is less need (or so they think) for students to see the teacher or T.A. at the first of the course, but at the end they always begin pouring underneath the door. This way, we will prevent some of that eternal last-minute rush and since the teacher has more time, he can see larger numbers of students who feel themselves being pulled down the drain.

Handwritten scribble

This won't do. We can't remove the teacher from a class.

definitely TA system

The result of this proposal then is:

- 1) The teacher, by lecturing to all 75 students at once, will avoid unnecessary duplication of material and time.
- 2) The teacher, running the workshop--can get to those students who need special attention and see that they get it.
- 3) We slowly train the T.A.--we don't make him/her just a grader and we don't just throw him into the classroom to sink or swim.
- 4) The relationship between the T.A. and the teacher will become truly a working one and not one of awkwardness
- 5) We (I firmly believe) will produce better writers because of the amount and kind of attention they will receive.

I must add that the nature and success of this course cannot be divorced from pedagogy. I am tempted to offer detailed explanation, since I know precisely every day of the course, but, for now, I do not want to exploit your attention. I realize, too, that a few questions need to be asked, so it goes without saying, I will be available at any time. Moreover, there are a few details (how to test the course's effectiveness, for example) that need to be mentioned but only, perhaps, if the proposal warrants serious consideration.

I thank you for your time, I am,

Sincerely yours,



Michael Adams

FEPC members

Richard Hart

4/11/79

Today's agenda:

- (1) Cameron constitutional changes
- [(2) Brief report on textbooks]
- (3) Adams request

Minutes, Freshman English Policy Committee

March 30, 1979

Parlin 214

Members present: Kinneavy, Trimble, Ruszkiewicz, Witte, Cameron,
Creel, Byars, Hart

Agenda:

Approval of minutes

Gross request

Textbook Subcommittee report

Cameron proposal for constitutional amendment

1. Since Ms. Gross was on hand and was not feeling well, the committee postponed approving minutes and agreed to question her swiftly.

In response to a question from Mr. Creel, Ms. Gross said that she plans to require seven student essays next fall and six plus a library paper in the spring. Dr. Trimble asked how revisions would figure in these plans, and Ms. Gross replied that although she had once let students revise all their essays, she now lets them revise only one for credit because she has found that they do better to revise before submitting their work to her. Dr. Trimble then asked how she gets students to revise in advance, and she said that she does so mainly by making certain students have as much time as possible between assignment and due dates. Dr. Trimble indicated approval of this strategy and added that she might also require students to attach at least one rough draft to the final copy of each essay. Mr. Cameron asked whether conferences might help in this regard, but Ms. Gross replied that although some students seek her out before turning their essays, most wait until afterwards.

Dr. Trimble then inquired whether Ms. Gross conducts pre- and post-tests, and she replied that she had not done so this semester. She had, however, kept close tabs on her students' progress and attitudes and had changed to a tutorial approach after conducting a straw vote. She said that the students love the course, all having expressed favorable opinions. Dr. Kinneavy added that he had seen her evaluations from last semester and that they were extraordinary.

Next, Mr. Cameron pointed out that since some degrees require E308 instead of E307, Ms. Gross would need to advise her students early in the first semester about possible degree-plan conflicts, and she said that she had anticipated having to do so. (Dr. Kinneavy noted that the committee needs to discuss degree-plan problems in general.)

Ms. Gross then called attention to her current students' grades. Only 23% of her class had made passing grades on the first essay assignment, but 86% had passed on the fourth one,

which she had graded 50% harder on a sliding scale. She had counted only style and mechanics on the first three essays and had not let organization and content become factors until the fourth. Interestingly, she said, content had still improved regularly without her having given specific attention to it. She concluded her remarks by singling out a key virtue of her tutorial approach: it makes students aware that someone actually reads their papers.

Following Ms. Gross's departure, there was a brief discussion of her request. Several committee members expressed doubts about the value of teaching mechanics and style, and one sagaciously observed--to nods of agreement--that Ms. Gross's individual attention to her students is what pays off in her course, not her emphasis on mechanics. Despite their reservations, however, all who spoke voiced confidence in Ms. Gross's teaching ability, and when Mr. Creel moved

that the committee approve Ms. Gross's request,

his motion passed unanimously.

2. The minutes of March 21 were amended and approved. In relation to the item on staffing, Dr. Kinneavy said that he and Professors Walter, Moldenhauer, Kruppa, and Rebhorn had met with the dean, who had asked them to draw up contingency hiring plans to meet possible freshman enrollments of 6200, 6500, and 6900--and to begin hiring immediately. As a result, Dr. Kinneavy said, AI's who plan to finish their dissertations this summer and seek instructorships here for the fall need to write the EC now. The dean, he continued, plans to hold AI and TA figures at current levels. Then Dr. Kinneavy asked whether we should send a notice to finishing AI's, and Mr. Creel suggested that we might instead pass our information along to AGSE and let them send the notice. Dr. Witte, however, cautioned wryly that in either case we would be setting a potentially dangerous departmental precedent by providing such information up front.

At this point, Mr. Cameron recalled that AGSE will soon hold elections, including those for its FEPC representatives. He reported that in an effort to get genuinely interested AI's elected to our committee, he had given AGSE a copy of the criteria the Personnel Subcommittee had developed last year for selecting an assistant director. He was fearful, he said, that AI's know less about the FEPC now that the counseling program is gone.

Initially Dr. Kinneavy seemed doubtful about AGSE having this material, but then he agreed that perhaps they should have it to do with what they want. Dr. Trimble asked what would happen if someone elected to the FEPC by AGSE were later chosen to fill the assistant director's post, and Dr. Kinneavy replied that AGSE could send us their candidate with the next largest number of votes.

3. Dr. Ruszkiewicz passed around for approval a memo to faculty describing textbook deliberations and soliciting opinion on some texts his subcommittee planned to set out in the faculty lounge. Dr. Kinneavy said that since most faculty members have no idea how we select texts, perhaps the memo should have an attachment further detailing the process, explaining how their comments would be used, and describing how they can request variant texts, so that we won't get such requests after a certain date.

Mr. Cameron asked whether we would want to allow requests for variants if we established a list of options. Dr. Ruszkiewicz responded that after seeking opinion on seven or eight texts, his group might recommend as few as one or as many as three, but that in any case he had assumed that faculty would still be entitled to request variants. Will we keep Patterns of Exposition? Mr. Creel inquired. Yes, Dr. Ruszkiewicz replied, though the subcommittee might also recommend offering an optional reader with longer selections. Our 398T courses might be hard to arrange around all these optional books, Dr. Witte speculated. But, Mr. Cameron replied, we can require all new AI's to use a standard list, as we have sometimes done before.

Dr. Ruszkiewicz then indicated that his subcommittee would have books in the lounge a week or so after 4 C's. With no teachers of 308PC in the group, though, there was uncertainty about texts for that course, he said, especially since the questionnaire response on Popular Writing in America had been inconclusive. Dr. Kinneavy replied that because silence on questionnaires normally indicates that no problems exist, the subcommittee would likely be safe in not worrying about 308PC. He went on to ask what the recommendation would be for the Corder handbook, and Dr. Ruszkiewicz responded that plans were to keep it. Dr. Witte pointed out that if one of our options were a rhetoric-handbook combination, we could put signs up in the Co-op telling students whose instructors had chosen it not to buy Corder. Finally, Dr. Kinneavy said that he would like to keep Corder one more year but eventually adopt a hardback handbook.

Dr. Ruszkiewicz concluded the discussion of textbooks by saying that because the task is so time consuming, the Textbook Subcom-

mittee probably should not have to choose more than three books a year.

4. Mr. Cameron called attention to a memo he had distributed in support of his proposed constitutional change and asked that the phrase "various sections of" be deleted so that his motion would now read:

I propose that the Constitution of the Freshman English Policy Committee, as adopted on March 24, 1976, be amended as follows:

Article VIII, Section A should be amended to replace "New and Variant Course Proposals" with "Curriculum," so that the revised statement will read:

"There shall be six standing sub-committees of the Freshman English Policy Committee: Admissions and Placement, Freshman 398T, Curriculum, Personnel, Program Evaluation, and Textbook."

Mr. Creel began discussion by pointing out that the amendment would merely change nomenclature and that consequently the committee could postpone reflecting on duties for the new Curriculum Subcommittee. Dr. Witte, however, asked whether we might not now talk about bringing outside members in to serve on subcommittees; but Mr. Cameron replied that we could even avoid discussing this problem since the constitution nowhere prohibits appointing outside members. Still, Dr. Witte persisted that he would like to have formal provision made for these people so that their time-consuming service could be seen in the department as being equal to, say, service on the sophomore committee. Our constitution, he hoped, could state the number of outsiders to be appointed to each subcommittee and specify a time for them to be named. Mr. Hart suggested that the document could be made to suit Dr. Witte's purpose by having it specify only a time for appointing any outside members, and that to go beyond this might bind us to an unnecessary and unwieldy subcommittee structure. Dr. Kinneavy added that we could also include a statement like, "Our Chair shall inform the Chair of the Department of subcommittee membership." Dr. Kinneavy went on to say that the entire document needs updating, especially to revise potentially sexist terms, and he asked Mr. Cameron to perform the task.

Mr. Creel then suggested that we postpone acting on Mr. Cameron's motion until the entire overhaul had been done. Dr. Trimble

asked whether the Personnel Subcommittee's criteria for choosing assistant directors might also have a place in the constitution, but Mr. Cameron, said that such matters belong more properly in our statement on operating procedures, which, he added, needs to have a section on TA policy. Dr. Witte than asked whether the committee should establish a procedure for monitoring TA use, but Dr. Kinneavy replied that the TAC should probably do that.

Dr. Kinneavy now asked whether the committee wanted to approve Mr. Cameron's motion or wait to vote on it along with other constitutional changes. Dr. Witte replied that since we would probably end up considering the issues separately, we might as well go ahead and vote on the present motion alone. Dr. Kinneavy called for a vote, and the motion passed unanimously. This much accomplished, Dr. Kinneavy declared the meeting adjourned.